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# ADVOCATE OF PEACE.

OCTOBER, 1844.

THOMAS CLARKSON ON PEACE. [CONCLUDED.]

I come now to the pitiable *ignorance* which your correspondent's letter betrays. "The primitive Christians," says he, "who might be expected to understand the doctrine of the New Testament on this subject, never scrupled to fight in the Roman armies. At one time, a part of the army, composed of Christians, gained an unexpected victory by means of a sudden thunder-storm, which the heathens took for an interposition of Heaven in their favor, and on that account called them the Thundering Legion." Here, then, we see two things, viz., a *proposition*, and its *proof*. The proposition maintains, that the primitive Christians never scrupled to bear arms, and the proof of it lies in the solitary story of the Thundering Legion. I wonder your correspondent did not add that of the Thebæan. Now, was there ever so much pitiable ignorance thrown into so short a sentence, as into that now quoted? Let us look at the proposition first. What! the early Christians never scrupled to fight in the Roman wars! Should he not rather have said, that they *never ceased* to scruple in this respect,—that is, the fathers of the church never ceased to decrie war as unlawful, and their disciples to obey them in practice, for the first two centuries? Is there any one, who pretends to be a reader of history, who has not heard (let it be true or false) that it was as much a characteristic or distinguishing feature of these centuries, that the Christians refused to bear arms, as it was in a more distant one, that they established the crusades?

With respect to the proof of the proposition, I may observe, first, that, had your correspondent been better informed, he would have known better than to have produced it. Unfortunately for him, his famous story has been long ago detected to be a forgery. Apollinaris, who lived at the time of the supposed miracle, was the first person who broached it. Tertullian was the next to give it currency. Eusebius, about a century afterwards, revived it. It was then taken up by Gregory Nyssen, Orosius, Xiphilin and Nicephorus in succession. From one or other of these, our English authors admitted it, without due examination, into their works; and here it was, no doubt, that your correspondent found it. It may, however, be proper to observe, that the credit of it lies entirely with Apollinaris, whose works are now lost; and I trust I shall soon show, either that this writer invented it to answer some purpose at the time, or that he had no just foundation for it.

I shall begin by observing, that there are three most egregious errors (and there could not have been more than three) in that which has been given us as a direct and infallible proof of the proposition. I shall make out the first, by showing that there were no Christians in the Roman armies in the time of Antoninus, or when this miracle was said to have happened; the second, by showing that the victory over the Quadi was never acknowledged to have been gained by the Christians at all; and the third, by showing that the Thundering Legion (and there was but one that then bore that name in all the Roman armies) was never in the battle which preceded it.

To go into a full refutation of the first of the errors in the proof, would be to fill a small volume; whereas I am not to forget that I am writing only a

letter which must have its bounds. I shall appeal, therefore, only to a few statements, made by authors who lived at the time of the supposed miracle; but I will take care that they shall be such as shall answer the end proposed.—Irenæus, who was cotemporary with Apollinaris, in his fourth book, “*Adversus Hæreses*,” and in the sixty-seventh chapter, the title of which is, “Against those who say, What new things has the coming of Christ brought among us?” reckons among these new things the *uncommon change* which had taken place among those who had received the Christian doctrines; for they had literally turned their swords into plough-shares, and their spears into pruning-hooks, and they knew no longer how to fight. At the same time lived Justin the martyr, who asserted the very same thing. It is very remarkable, that both these authors believed that the prophecies of Isaiah and Micah were then in a train for completion; and for this they had no other warrant than what they daily saw, viz., the extraordinary fact, that as men became converts to Christianity (which conversion was then spreading in the most rapid manner), they would no longer engage in war.—To the authority of these, let me add that of Celsus. The latter was a heathen philosopher, and a man of learning. He knew not only what was passing in Rome and Italy, but also what was passing in the most distant parts of the empire. He had also a very particular knowledge of the Christians. He took great pains to make himself acquainted with their religious doctrines, their manner of life, their customs, and their character; and when he had obtained what he thought a sufficient knowledge of these, he let it all loose against them, in a book which he wrote expressly for that purpose. This book contained a collection of charges against them, from the beginning to the end; and among these was that which relates to the present case, viz., that they refused to bear arms for the emperor,—*i. e.*, for the very emperor under whom, according to the story of the miracle, they are said to have fought against the Quadi! Nay, he went so far as to tell them, that if other people were to follow their example, the Roman empire would be soon over-run by the barbarians.—This book of Celsus was afterwards answered by Origen. But what was the nature of this reply? Origen attempted to refute these charges, one by one, in the most patient manner, till he came to the particular one now before us; and when he came to this, he was so far from denying it, as he had done the others, that he admitted it to be true; yes, he admitted that the Christians of that age would have nothing to do with the military service. I will translate what he said on this occasion. “Celsus,” says Origen, “exhorts us to aid the emperor to the utmost of our power in carrying on his just wars, and not to refuse the military service, should necessity require it. We reply, that we assist him on all proper occasions, not, however, by a reliance on our human, but on our spiritual armor; and we do this in obedience to the words of the apostle, who exhorts, that first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and for all that are in authority. And the more genuine,” continues he, “every Christian man’s piety is, the more he may be said to assist the emperor on such an occasion,—far more, indeed, than the soldier, drawn up in battle array, and killing as many of the enemy as he can. To those who are not of our religious persuasion, and who urge us to war and slaughter in behalf of the state, we reply, Do not your priests keep their hands pure from human blood, that they may offer in the most spotless manner their customary sacrifices to those whom you call your gods? And is it not on this very account that you exempt the sacerdotal order from military service in every war whatever? But if this be a solid argument with you, how much more, while others are fighting, ought our services to be duly appreciated, who keep our hands pure, and contend with prayers to God in behalf of our lawful emperor, and of soldiers engaged in his just and pious wars, that every thing may be thrown down which rises up in opposition to those who do well. Therefore, putting to flight by our prayers all those demons who are

the authors of war, and the disturbers of the public peace, we do more for princes than they who carry arms for them. We labor also for the state, by praying for it, so long as we lead just lives, and despise the seducing pleasures of the world. In this manner we fight beyond all others for the emperor; for though we refuse to serve him as soldiers, even if he command us so to do, or necessity require it, yet we serve him by pitching our tents under the auspices of piety, and by combating for him with our prayers."

With respect to the second error, it is clear from the history of those times, that the victory over the Quadi was never acknowledged to have been gained by the Christians at all. Antoninus, who is said to have been in the battle, never acknowledged it himself, but, on the other hand, attributed it to the heathen gods. He ordered a pillar to be built, and a medal to be struck on the occasion. Both are now extant. One gave the victory to Jupiter, the other to Mercury; that is, first to the ruler of the world as the first great moving cause, and secondly to his ministerial agent, who was supposed to execute his commands in the air. With respect to the Pagan writers, they either disowned the miracle, or they attributed it to the same cause. The Christians themselves did not believe it. How happens it that the greatest and most eloquent men of their times, the least credulous and the most to be depended upon, such as Theophilus, Clemens, Origen, Cyprian, Arnobius, and Lactantius, should not even have noticed it? Nay, Eusebius himself did not thoroughly credit it. He begins his relation of it as of a mere story, and not as of an acknowledged fact. His first words are these,—“There goes a report;” and he concludes by these remarkable words,—“but of this matter let every one judge as he thinks fit.”

The last error, viz., that the Melitenian Legion took the name of “The Thundering,” in consequence of having been the chief instrument of gaining the victory in question, may be refuted in a few words. There was but one legion, viz., the twelfth, which bore that name, in all the Roman armies, at least for the first four centuries. We find it so early as in the time of Augustus, which was at least one hundred and fifty years before the event now spoken of. This legion was afterwards at the siege of Jerusalem, but removed for cowardice, according to Josephus, from Syria to Melitene, on the borders of Cappadocia and Armenia, where it remained afterwards. Dio places it there in his time, and the *Notitia* and Procopius give it long after this the same quarter. It was in fact quartered at Melitene for three hundred years, and no one ever heard of it, after its removal from Syria, any where else but there. Of course, it could not have been present at the battle against the Quadi, in Germany. The error of Eusebius, says a very learned critic, is easily accounted for. “Having heard that a legion had received a surname from the victory, and finding no other Thundering Legion on the list but that quartered at Melitene, he gave it the honor of the miracle on this occasion.”

It now remains only that I should notice for a moment, but in a very different point of view, a part of the passage in your correspondent's letter, upon which so much has been just said, viz., where he asserts “that the primitive Christians, who might be expected to understand the doctrines of the New Testament on this subject, never scrupled to fight in the Roman wars.” This portion of the passage, though very short, is very precious, at least in the light in which I view it. It contains, as we cannot but see, both a proposition and an inference. The proposition is, that it is but reasonable to suppose that the primitive Christians understood the doctrines of their new faith; and the inference is, that, if they understood them as well as might be supposed or expected, but yet did not scruple to become soldiers, they could not have considered the military service as an unlawful or an objectionable occupation. Now I most heartily join with your correspondent in the truth of the proposition. I do most willingly allow, that the primitive Christians understood all that the apostles taught them, and as extensively, and as minutely, and as fully, as your correspondent expects;

but I infer (seeing that they refused to bear arms, as I have already shown) that they did *not* think the military service compatible with their religious profession.

I shall close my letter by recommending to your correspondent, should he attempt to scribble again, to speak more liberally and tenderly than he has done of the characters of men engaged in peace societies, who can have no other view in such engagement than the good of all mankind, in which that of their own country is included. Should he adopt such a line of conduct in future, he may be assured, that those who may be inclined to reply to him will treat him liberally and tenderly in return, however they may have censured his sophistry, or condemned his virulence, or thought meanly of his literary attainments.

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#### ELLIOTT'S THOUGHTS ON PEACE. NO. II.

SELF-DEFENCE NO JUSTIFICATION OF WAR.—We firmly believe that, whatever may be claimed as the right of self-defence, in whatever light we may regard homicide for the preservation of life, with whatever pertinacity we may hold to the necessity of physical force for the protection of society against the evil-doer, still all this cannot justify national war. We are willing to admit the full force of the only argument used against non-resistants—an argument which is brought in every shape that human ingenuity can devise,—that their principles would sometimes lead to the sacrifice of life; that there is no perfect safety or certain protection for him who loves his enemies, and who would do good to those who despitely use him. The most benevolent who have lived upon the earth, the kind-hearted, the mildest and most forgiving, have died by the hands of those to whom they would do good. The history of the world presents but one continued drama of oppression and bloodshed. Innocency has not always been a protection; gentleness of spirit, and meekness have not always warded off the evil passions of men.

But let us ask, is the sword a sure defence? Only to the strong and powerful. On the principle of resistance, then, physical strength is to decide all human rights. If the advocates of the necessity of wars and fightings will recur to the fact, that at least eight hundred millions of men have miserably perished in the act of resistance, if they will stretch their imagination so as to conceive of the countless hosts of spirits now in the spirit-land, who died for the safety of human life, they will not deem the danger to life from the principles of peace so strong an argument against submission to injury.

We can have no illustration more forcible of the danger to life and to human happiness, arising from the common notions of self-defence than the Indian wars. From the landing of the pilgrims at Plymouth up to the present time, this people have waged a war of self-defence against the Indian, which will be continued until every tribe be swept from the earth. There has been no safety for *them* surely; yet they are our brethren, children of the same God. The arrow and the spear saved not their lives, nor defended their homes, nor preserved for them the burial places of their fathers. Nor was there safety for the white man. There was no peace for the savage; the party that were victorious, are the murderers of the others. In vain did our fathers take the sword, arming themselves as against the wild beasts whom they would hunt to their very dens. In vain were their arms with them when they planted the seed, or gathered in the harvest; at the social meeting, and at the season of prayer—they were never safe. Almost every grassy mound is the monument of the slain; almost every glade and dell was once the place of ambush; almost every rippling brook and placid lake has been reddened with blood. Nor did the soldier suffer alone; the young woman and the matron; the old man and the young child; the brother and the sister shared the same fate. Thousands were carried into captivity; and, says Cotton Mather, “what weary